

**Music at MIT Oral History Project**

**John D. Corley**

*Interviewed*

*by*

**Forrest Larson**

*with* **Frederick Harris Jr.**

**December 10, 1999**

**Interview no. 3**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Lewis Music Library**

Transcribed by: University of Connecticut, Center for  
Oral History, Tapescribe, from the audio recording

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## Table of Contents

1. Esprit de corps of the MIT Concert Band (17:00—CD1 17:00).....1  
*Original purpose of the band—collaboration with women’s colleges—student responsibilities—social component—Richard Nordlof—John Corley Concert Band Fund—Arthur Fiedler—Boston Brass Quartet*
2. MIT faculty and student composers, concert band repertoire (27:35—CD1 27:35).....6  
*Andrew Kazdin—Gregory Tucker—Ernst Lévy—Tech Show—Brett Vanderlaan—Jeffrey Morrow—Adrian Childs—Alan Pierson—William Grossman—Edward Madden*
3. Dissertation on the MIT Concert Band by Kenneth Ayoob (41:00—CD1 40:55).....9
4. MIT’s support of music, jazz, vocal groups and Kresge Auditorium (47:10—CD1 47:10).....11  
*Budget—John Corley Concert Band Fund—Samuel Jay Keyser—Herb Pomeroy—Tectonians—Kresge Auditorium*
5. Reminiscences about the MIT Concert Band (1:02:40—CD2 01:20).....15  
*Administrative and artistic duties— Working with composers—tours—Chip Moss and the shofar—student soloists—rehearsals—memory book*
6. Future of the MIT Concert Band and Frederick Harris (1:17:50—CD2 16:45).....18  
*Fred Harris as student—Paul Husby—John Corley’s counsel—Fred Harris questions—commissioning program—Marek Zebrowski—new music premiered by Concert Band—influence of Serge Koussevitzky and Arthur Fiedler*

### **Note on timing notations:**

Recording of this interview can be found either as one continuous file or as split up over two audio CDs. Timings are designated in chapter headings in both formats, with the timing on the full file preceding the timing on the CD version.

## Contributors

**John D. Corley** (1919-2000) was founding Director and Conductor of the MIT Concert Band from 1948 to 1999, and conductor of the MIT Symphony Orchestra from 1955 to 1965. He was a leader among conductors dedicated to performing music originally written for the concert band, giving Boston premieres of works by Copland, Hindemith, Schoenberg, and others. A strong advocate for contemporary composers, over 50 new works were commissioned by him for the MIT Concert Band. He had been a member of the Boston Brass Quartet, and was an active freelance trumpet player. During World War II he served in the U.S. Army as Band Leader in Iceland. From 1973 to 1980, he conducted the Boston Conservatory Wind Ensemble, and was Director of Music for the Brookline Massachusetts Public Schools from 1956 to 1973. He also founded and directed the Boston Brass Ensemble.

**Frederick Harris, Jr.** has been Music Director of the MIT Wind Ensemble and the MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble since fall of 1999.

**Forrest Larson**, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on December 10, 1999, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:54:34. Third of three interviews. First interview: August 19, 1999; second interview: September 3, 1999.

## Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers, and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the *Music at MIT Oral History Project* is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

## 1. Esprit de corps of the MIT Concert Band (00:22—CD1 00:22)

FORREST LARSON: This is the third interview with John Corley. And Fred Harris [Frederick Harris, Jr.], who is the Director of Wind Ensembles at MIT currently, now is also here. It's December 10th, 1999, and we're in the Lewis Music Library, and I'm Forrest Larson. So John, thank you again very much for coming. This is an honor and privilege to do this with you.

Last interview we talked a lot about the MIT Concert Band, but there were some more questions that I wanted to ask, particularly about the culture that has developed around the MIT Concert Band. It's extraordinary. There's a band alumni association, almost. I mean, they really stay in contact with each other. The college where I went to there was no alumni association with the orchestra that I was in, or any other groups that I was in, and I think that's quite interesting. There's a particular rapport that you have with the students. Can you talk about this sense of community and the rapport that you've had with the students? Tell me something about that.

JOHN CORLEY: When I was interviewed for the position, way back in September of—it must have been—1948, it was explained to me that what was being pursued was somebody to occupy the student who couldn't be accommodated by the limitation to the orchestra, or the extra brass, the extra wind, percussion—somebody who would occupy those people who really wanted to play in something in such a way that it would take their minds off their academic studies for two hours, for rehearsal. Which, it was explained to me that a vigorous intellectual activity apart from their studies was as much therapy as reading a comic book, or something like that—that the students, if they're away from their studies, needed to have something else to think about which was so challenging that they couldn't think of anything but what they were doing at the music stand. The students were the thing. The emphasis was not on what music you were playing, but that the students had something worthwhile that would make them want to come back time after time.

And right away we headed into as much original music as I then knew about, which would be the [Gustav] Holst Suites 1 and 2, the [Ralph] Vaughan Williams, [Ottorino] Respighi. We were very limited as to how much original music was—there was a symphony by Ernest Williams [1881-1947], which was very nice, but now it's quite dated. And so almost immediately Andrew Kazdin [MIT class of 1963], who was in that group, wrote a piece for us, which was called *Marche Baroque*. And we ended up using that a great deal. And that led ultimately to three other compositions by Andy Kazdin. And we premiered them and took them on “tours,” which would be a weekend concert at Vassar or Smith College, Wellesley or Lasell [Junior College]. The band was predominantly men; there may have been—there might have been one coed.

I remember a blonde coed playing cymbals and every time she'd clap the cymbals together the air coming out from between the cymbals would make her hair fly out. And so I mentioned in rehearsal, “When we get to such and such a beat, stop playing and look around at the cymbal player.” And boom! And there was the hair flying up, coming back like a waterfall. That backfired, though, because she quit.

She didn't want to have that much prominence. [laughs] But as the band changed, with more ladies in it, rehearsals changed too. I dignified my language more and so we communicated more maturely.

But the students were the thing; it was to keep the students occupied, to make them want to come back. And of course a part of that was to always play something at the end of the rehearsal, hopefully in context, consecutively, that would end with an upbeat, maybe in the major. [laughs] It could have been the minor too, but something that would—so as they were putting away their instruments, they were whistling the tune. I wanted them to say, “Gee, I've got to come back for the next rehearsal!” Rather than end on a dominant chord, or something like that, which doesn't work. I was shocked when I was first an extra man in the Boston Symphony and the rehearsal ended on a dominant chord. The musicians didn't care; they just walked off the stage, begrudgingly looking at their watch if they'd been overtime a minute or something.

Now, keep in mind this was a part-time position for me—nights. It was one night a week for a long time. And we eventually got it to two nights a week, which meant that they played their instruments twice as much because the way it was, they were so busy as students they would come one night a week and then put the instrument away for a whole week—wouldn't touch it. There'd be a lot of dust on the music cases, the instrument cases. But by going to two times a week, it kept the embouchures in better shape, which was important.

And being a part-time position, I wasn't free during the day to come over and take care of things, or work on parts, or to work on instruments that we'd acquired. And I used to leave a lot of the decision-making of the band to the student officers. The president was assisted by a vice president, who also served as a tour manager. And as an aside, I remember there was a while there they thought one of the job descriptions of the tour manager should be that he had an automobile, so he could travel around to girls' schools and arrange concerts. That's why, being a male group, we went to Vassar, to Wheaton, Lasell, Wellesley, Smith College, Mount Holyoke—they were girls' schools. And they really mixed very well.

Jumping ahead a few years, when I was conducting the [MIT] orchestra, we also were trying to get out to women's colleges. We combined more than once with Wellesley, and also more than once with Smith. But I noticed that the orchestra didn't mix as well as the band did at the girls' schools. The men in the band always were ready to dance with the girls, but the men in the orchestra were back to talking bowings or something like that! Down-bow and that sort—

FL: [laughs]

JC: I remember one of the directors came over to me and says, “Don't your men like our girls?” And I had to press the word—mix a little more, and there again officers took care of it and it worked out all right. I'm deviating here from—but some of the combined concerts with the girls' schools produced some wonderful music, one of which was *Festival Preludium* [*Festliches Präludium*, op. 61], I think it is, by Richard Strauss, for double orchestra. And not only a double orchestra onstage, but I had

something like eight or ten trumpets in the choir loft for an off-stage trumpet effect. It was wonderful! I have a recording of that.

But heading back to your question on the Concert Band, since officers were elected and chosen, chosen and elected by the students, I gave time always for the officers to make announcements, which they would do. They would periodically have mixers or refreshments. So there was a social side to the band, to rest the lips, and get them to meet each other. They needed to meet each other, know each other, and of course we now have many examples of, when the band became more coed, of people who mixed and ultimately married. A lot of married couples came out of the band association. And [laughs] I can almost see a whole collage of faces. A saxophone player who married a solo clarinetist, and I can see those people coming together. That sort of thing didn't go by unnoticed. I know I was happy that that was happening, that they were meeting each other.

And I've had a lot of letters over the years that, "If it hadn't been for the MIT Concert Band, I would have quit MIT." That was a reason that kept me coming back. And just recently, I had a communication from a clarinetist, Pauline, who said, "You have no idea how many people were on the verge of suicide, but the band kept them going. They realized they were important to the band and would be missed." That kind of shook me up. I can't think of Pauline's last name right now—played second clarinet. [Pauline Bennett, MIT class of 1985]

It didn't seem to matter so much what they played on their loyalty. Dick Nordlof [Richard Nordlof, MIT Class of 1955] played second clarinet all the time he was in the band. And I was a bit surprised when we had our final concert, May 1st [1999], that Dick Nordlof sent for flute parts. He had transferred to the flute, and he was here. [This concert included alumni of the band.] Nordlof has contributed \$5,000 to the John Corley Concert Band Fund! Tremendous dedication to the band! Some people send fifty dollars; some people send a hundred. He's pledged, or given already, \$5,000 to the fund. It meant that much to him, and he never played more than second clarinet.

FL: Wow!

JC: —but felt privileged to be able to do that, to be a part of the bigness of the thing, the sonorities of the thing, to contribute that little bit, you see. And he ended up contributing a lot of money to that.

I'd try to involve the Concert Band also in programming, and they were always coming up with me: "I heard a piece at a festival," or something. "Do you know such-and-such a piece?" If I didn't know it, I would look it up and try to get my friends at Carl Fischer [music publisher], which was then existent, to chase it, to find that piece. And a number of pieces came into the library [of the MIT Concert Band] because of students interested in them. They also developed a habit of looking for original pieces, manuscripts, or pieces that were written, commissioned by other groups, for band—not arrangements of show tunes or that sort of thing.

The policy of going into original music didn't come in until 1952, '53; we'd been going a while, playing *Polka and Fugue* from *Schwanda* [*the Bagpiper*, opera by Jaromir Weinberger (1896-1967)], with those extra trumpets, an organ. An organ!

We played some good transcriptions, but we also had an orchestra [MIT Symphony] that was playing *Polka and Fugue* from *Schwanda*. It sounds better in a concert band than it does for an orchestra. I've done it for both! [laughs] I'm talking too much.

FL: You're doing beautiful. There's a tremendous spirit with the MIT Concert Band. I just wanted to get some more insight into that. And it seems that it's because you're giving the students a lot of responsibility, and it's not just a matter of them showing up and you telling them what to do. And so, there has to be that sense of community in order for that to work. That's quite extraordinary.

JC: Yeah. A thing that became very evident to me early on was that these students didn't come to MIT to be musicians, they were here to study something else, and that the music was to be an important avocation, not the reason for their being here. And so when a student came up and says, "I'm going to have to miss Wednesday's rehearsal," I said, "Well, it's a big one. Can you come in for any part of it? Can you come in for the last half-hour? Or come early and leave early?" So that they knew they could talk to me about their attendance problems.

I remember the first—not the first time—but I had the Hindemith Symphony [Symphony in B-Flat] on the second semester finale concert. And five minutes before the rehearsal was to begin there were about ten people there because they were coming— But by the time it was five after the hour, there was enough to go ahead and start the rehearsal. But they were busy! And if I'd given a hard time, says, "You've got to be here, or else!" they might have given it up; they wouldn't have been there at all. And by cooperating with the students, knowing their academic pressures, I think I had more support because they knew they could talk to me.

I used to try to spread the talent—that's a hard word for me to say because of my throat—around, so that the best players weren't always the first players. Because I needed—if this is the first clarinet, second clarinet, third clarinet—probably the best clarinet's right here on the end of the first clarinet section, and the next best on the end of the second clarinets, and the third best, usually underclassmen, on the end of the third clarinets. So if I had to, at certain passages I could say, just the outside desks play on this passage, and then everyone else come in at the tutti. Or mark such-and-such a spot tutti. So I could thin it out and still have the very adequate players on the ends of the sections.

Now some groups, Dartmouth [University] in particular, would rotate players. As soon as they finished a number the band would stand up and they'd all be shuffling around, finding different chairs. I never got that organized, that I could work out a rotated schedule like that, because I wanted—if the rehearsal started at eight o'clock and finished at ten, I wanted them to be as busy as possible from eight to ten, except for the break or the intermission. And that didn't mean that only the best players were playing certain numbers—that they were all onstage and if I was working with the outside players for a certain solo passage, or ripiano thing, the ripiano players were there and waiting for this to terminate, or this to be finished, and then we'd involve everyone. So I tried to keep everyone busy, because if they're not busy, even though they're onstage, their mind is going to drift back to whatever I've



got to do when I get out of this rehearsal, what's on the desk waiting for me back at the room, you know.

FL: There's also a musical respect that they had, because you also had musical and artistic standards that they respected and that they strove for. I mean, at the last interview we talked about some of your rehearsal techniques and stuff. And so, you worked with them in the context of their demanding academic schedules and stuff, but it seems that they also had a tremendous respect for you as an artist.

JC: Well, they turned me on as a musician. I can remember many times coming to rehearsals, and so tired. I had been going all day in Brookline [Mass.], and the Brookline job involved not only the public schools, but the Brookline Music School, the Chamber Music Society, the Youth Concerts. It was a [laughs]—they're many hats that I had to wear in that. And I hit MIT and oh, it's going to be a long two hours. I'd walk in and hear them warming up, hear them practicing passages and, you know, their way of warming up wasn't to be playing a pop tune, but to be working on the parts. And you'd hear them working. And more than once I would hear the drum section, which was usually moving equipment after a rehearsal, have their own little rehearsal on a certain passage. They'd stay overtime and work something out by themselves.

But their energy, their enthusiasm for working on parts, would turn me on and bring out whatever musician there is in me, to make music. I think I owe some of that to Arthur Fiedler [Boston Pops Conductor] because I played—he was my college, at BU [Boston University], he led the BU Symphony and I was the first trumpet, and later played for him at Symphony Hall. And we were on committees together, so I got to know Fiedler and would drive him to rehearsals when he—I had him as the conductor for the New England Intercollegiate Band and took him to all those rehearsals. But Fiedler was always upset if something was boring, if it wasn't interesting, and fight dullness, fight dullness!

I can remember sitting at Symphony Hall with Harry Ellis Dickson [Boston Pops Assistant Conductor, and Founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Youth Concert Series] and Fiedler, judging candidates for Youth Concert solo positions. And Fiedler would be sitting there, "Dull, dull, dull, dull." He was annoyed when somebody was playing something that was very dull—to keep it always active, keep it alive. And that means even on a sustained note, depending on what the role of that note is, it either should be going somewhere, maybe intensifying, or maybe pulling out of the way for somebody else who is intensifying. That was always something going on. You could do that a lot by asking for—well, I can't say that anymore, but I used to ask them, "Feed the half note. Feed the note. Color the half note. Where is the climax of that phrase? Where are we building? Where is it going to terminate?" And many times you'd say, "Your crescendos are better than your diminuendos." It's easier to make a crescendo on a wind instrument than it is to make a controlled diminuendo, to have that sound, of course. I used to say to them, "The better the band, the softer they can play." And that's right. You know, that means just touch it; just touch it.

Being a brass player, and having played a long time in a lot of churches, I learned how to play softly. We were—the Boston Brass Quartet was the house band with St. Paul’s Cathedral [The Cathedral Church of St. Paul. Boston, Mass.] for ten years. It was every Sunday, fifty-two weeks of the year! [laughs] Sometimes three times on a Sunday in certain seasons. Incidentally, I learned just yesterday that Bob King had died. [Robert Davis King, 1914-1999, euphonium, founder of the quartet]

FL: No! No!

JC: He died December 2nd.

FL: Oh, no. I didn’t know that.

JC: And Herb Philpott called me, and—you know Herb Philpott? [Herbert J. Philpott, faculty at Boston Conservatory of Music]

FL: Right.

JC: Herb called last night and said that King had died. And that really did a number on me. Because Bob King was the bottom of the brass quartet. I was the B [flat] cornet, and Bob was on the bottom. My brother [Robert O. Corley] was the trombone, and Bob Boudreau [Robert Austin Boudreau, b. 1927], later Al Ball [full name not confirmed], was the second trumpet. Or—we were usually cornets; we played cornets, so they were all, except for the trombone, conical instruments.

## **2. MIT faculty and student composers, Concert Band repertoire (00:22—CD1 00:22)**

FL: So I wanted to ask you a bit more—I’ve been really struck by the number of really fine student performers and composers at MIT. And is there anything you want to talk about, you know, why that is? Because people don’t come here primarily to be musicians, but there are so many wonderful musicians and composers, student composers, that consistently—each year there’s a crop of freshmen that come that amaze me!

JC: Well, I understand Albert Einstein [physicist, 1879-1955] played violin, though I never heard of how much of a violinist he was. But I think an intense brain activity naturally is attracted to music, and making music. Gee, I’ll never forget walking along Building 4—it was Building 4. I was walking along there—I’ve forgotten what time of day it was—but as I was coming by one of the labs I heard a string quartet. And I thought, “Gee, that’s a lousy recording that they have.” Then this piece stopped, and it started up again, and I realized that there was a string quartet in that lab, rehearsing, or passing the time, playing a string quartet! And so I never looked in the door or anything, but I visualized it was probably a professor who played a string instrument and three of his students, while something was cooking on the burner, you know.

FL: [laughs]

JC: It all seemed to go together. I think it's natural that people who are good thinkers, think well, want to be in music, or like music as an avocation. I never have said this to the students, and you may want to edit this out, but I'll characterize MIT and music as: there's no substitute for brains. You know, we're able to do things at MIT that I couldn't do at the conservatory. I also taught at BU. You know, there was a level of mental activity here at MIT that made the difference, that a piece of music that would fall flat at conservatory would come alive at MIT. And when you turn that energy, that intellect, into composition, you're going to get something interesting.

Andy Kazdin's music was interesting. I'm not sure how intellectual it was. And Andy was one of those composers who would play something at the piano, and then copy down. He might be playing on the white keys, which means automatically two sharps for the B-flat instruments, three sharps for the E-flat instruments, and so on, rather than put it in another key. Then he'd get up on the black keys and he'd copy that. That might have been the best part for the wind instruments.

Now, MIT composers. Of course, Gregory Tucker [MIT Professor of Music, 1947-1971] was the first of the MIT composers. He was on staff. He was a pianist, and very good. And his—is there a Tucker here? I've forgotten. [looks at list] *Prelude and Allegro*, Greg Tucker—yeah. And he was staff, and his piece is still a very good piece, a wonderful piece. One of the earliest pieces written for us was by Ernst Lévy—you know that name? [MIT Professor of Humanities, 1954-1960]

FL: Mm-hm.

JC: And his—he called it a *Suite for Band*, I think, but it was actually variations on the Swiss national anthem. And [pause] as I recall, it started out with a fantasy on a counterpoint based on the tune, and then it went into various variations in various meters, and each variation got more simple, and finally you ended up with the anthem itself. Like *Istar Variations* of—Istar [full title *Istar: Variations Symphoniques*, op.42]—Who does—Vincent d'Indy [1951-1931]. The most complicated variations are at the beginning, and by the time you get to the end of it the whole orchestra is playing in unison. Lévy is not a crowd-pleaser, though, for some reason. It ends with an anthem, and you feel like standing up and crossing your heart. But what an experience it is to play, and to conduct! Student composers had an outlet when I first came to MIT, which was the MIT Tech Show [annual musical theater production, original music and book by MIT students, 1899-1936, 1947-1969]. Do you have any Tech Show recordings?

FL: I think we do.

JC: Is that—I have some. I better bring those over and give them to you before it's too late. And the student composers who wrote Tech Show, the student book, did some awfully clever things. And I, more than once, did the orchestrations. And there were a number of shows I conducted in the pit, which was my favorite kind of conducting. To be doing a show for MIT, and to be in the pit, and knowing a funny line coming up! And the whole audience would laugh at once for two reasons: the acoustics were such that they were hearing it quickly, and secondly, they're all smart, so they got the joke right away. And it was fun, listening to things explode like that. *Loch, Scotch, and Barrel* [1961] was one of them. We had a bagpipe in the pit. [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JC: Yeah, big brass overture and suddenly bagpipe—wow! I get goose bumps thinking about it.

FL: Okay, I'm going to turn the tape recorder off just for a second here.

[pause in recording]

JC: Students who wrote serious music for the band were not that many. I happened to see a score this morning—I was looking for some material—by Brett Vanderlaan [MIT class of 1990].

FL: Oh, yes! I remember him.

JC: Do you remember that name?

FL: I certainly do!

JC: I'll be darned! And he wrote a piece for us, and I think he had in mind an extended work, maybe even a symphony. But what he finally got onto paper, and into parts, was only one movement [Symphonic Movement for Band, 1990]. And we did that; we played it, and it was subsequently taped at the concert. Brett Vanderlaan was—if that's the way to say his name, I forgot—was a clarinetist in the band. I'm trying to think now of some of the other student composers who wrote serious music for us. You reminded me.

FL: Well, there were the two pieces you did last spring.

JC: Oh, yes! Well! They were—one was by Jeff Morrow [Jeffrey Morrow, MIT class of 1996], and he had studied composition here, and also it was Peter Childs. And both, I think, very interesting pieces.

FL: You mean Adrian Childs [MIT class of 1994].

JC: Adrian Childs.

FL: Yes.

JC: What did I say?

FL: Peter Childs [Child], who is a composer here, on the faculty [Professor of Music].

JC: Peter—yeah, of course! [laughs] Adrian. And I think they're both pursuing composition now.

FL: That's right. I hear Adrian's doing quite well.

JC: Yeah. Now, Alan Pierson [MIT class of 1996] was another very gifted performer and composer. He wrote a piece for us that we did at commencement, a fanfare, which was anything but a fanfare in the usual sense of the word. It was quite a difficult piece. And Jeff Moore, Jeff Morrow, wrote some music that we used for commencement. He also wrote a *Suite for Band*, several movements, and very, very clean, good material. Bill Grossman [William Grossman, MIT class of 1969] wrote pieces for the brass, and Bill is still conducting *Cats*, you know, in New York.

FL: Oh, yes.

JC: He's been doing it for twenty-five years! He says it pays the rent. And Bill has been of tremendous assistance to me over the years. And on the Gregory Tucker *Prelude and Allegro*, we had a set of parts but no score. And Eddie [Edward J.] Madden roughed out a lead sheet for me from some of the parts, and so I had a score that had only the melodies in it. Here's a hint of what might be going on in the bass, or something. But Bill Grossman took all the parts, and took the best parts, the cleanest parts, and produced them through his computer into a score, and then ran off parts, and really spent a lot of time, and extra trips up here to Boston from New York, to go over the parts and score with me. So we now have a beautifully clear copy of Gregory Tucker's piece. And we need to do that with some of the other manuscripts, get them into the computers.

FL: Absolutely.

JC: So they're available.

### **3. Dissertation on the MIT Concert Band by Kenneth Ayoob**

FL: Speaking of the manuscripts that you have and the commissioning program, there is the dissertation on the MIT Concert Band that Kenneth Ayoob had done in 1988. ["An Annotated Bibliography of Original Works for Band Commissioned by or Composed for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Concert Band between 1952 and 1987"] Can you tell me the circumstances of that, how you got to know him, and the whole project?

JC: This must have happened about eleven or twelve years ago. I don't know the date of that.

FL: 1988.

JC: 1988, aha. All right. Ken Ayoob—I made available to Ken Ayoob the tapes and scores that I had of the manuscripts that had been written for us. And I spent the summer pulling out the performances of the various pieces that had been written for us. And he took them and—I haven't seen his thesis, but presumably went through them, and he evaluated them too.

FL: Every single one of them.

JC: He did?

FL: And there's a thematic index in there too.

JC: Yeah. I need to see that. I spent the summer, really, supplying tapes and scores to Ken Ayoob, and I'd be very interested in what he finished, what he produced as a result of it.

FL: So how did you get to know him? Did he come to you? Was he a student of yours at any point?

JC: No. I seem to remember that his wife played saxophone, and she may have been a teacher for me at the Brookline Music School, or somehow. I don't know what

instrument he played, if any. But I think her name was Virginia. But he contacted me, yeah. Was one of his readers Frank Battisti [New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble Conductor Emeritus]?

FL: Well, the dissertation was from the University of Northern Colorado.

JC: Oh!

FL: Let me see if it gives any advisors. Sometimes on the thesis page, it does. It says University of Northern Colorado Graduate School. Well, wait a minute, let's see. Kenneth Singleton—oh, my goodness! And then, here's his advisors: Richard Bourassa and Harvey Rude.

JC: Huh. Why do I know that name?

FL: He's a Charles Ives scholar. He's at Yale University now [interviewer mistaken, not at Yale], if it's the same Kenneth Singleton. Don't know if it's the same person, but it could be.

JC: Hm.

FL: That's very interesting, that he had heard about the commissioning program not by way of being a student of yours. Because he seemed quite impressed with the program and saw it as a model that he wished that other schools of music and universities might follow, to commission new music.

JC: Does it give any biography on Ayoob as to where he was attending school? Was he in Boston?

FL: It doesn't say, but he seemed to know a lot about Boston, the local music scene. He makes many, many references to local things, as though he was familiar with the area.

JC: She was in the Musician's Union.

FL: Uh-huh.

JC: She was in the union, and somehow I thought he was New England Conservatory, or something.

FL: It might be that he'd done like a master's degree, or something.

JC: Yeah, because Frank Battisti [Conductor of the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble] at could have pointed him in my direction, and more recently a man whose name I don't remember right now wanted to do a similar thing. And I said, "You know, it's been done, by Ken Ayoob." And I think I said that this book was available here at MIT. And he dropped the subject. He didn't call me anymore; he had been in touch with me quite a bit to come see the manuscripts and all that. So it was ground that had already been covered.

FL: So how long did he work with you when he was doing the research?

JC: All one summer.

FL: Wow!

JC: Yeah. It took up a lot of time that summer, I remember. Huh.

#### 4. MIT's support of music, jazz, vocal groups and Kresge Auditorium (47:10—CD1 47:10)

FL: Wow, wow. I wanted to follow up on just one more thing that we were talking about a little earlier. The support that the arts have at MIT is extraordinary. You hear about other schools where they cut back on the music program when the budget gets tight. And that certainly doesn't seem to have happened at MIT. Support seems to grow for the arts and music at MIT.

JC: Well, there was a cutback two, three, four years ago that terminated our going on tour.

FL: Uh-huh.

JC: The budget went down quite a bit. And there again, I was never really on top of the budget matters. I had student officers that investigated that. But suddenly we didn't have the funds to go on tour anymore. And our concerts were always free of charge. We didn't have any money-making operations. The John Corley Concert Band Fund was established about ten years ago to make money available for special projects, like commissioning of composers, or producing the CD, or that sort of thing. But I didn't think it should pay for bus transportation or motel rooms or anything like that. That fund, incidentally, is at the level of about \$63,000 right now; it's been terrific.

But there was a cutback that curtailed the traveling. But I've always felt there was good support from the Music Section on the Concert Band. I think they appreciated that it was important to the students to have such an activity going on, as well as the vocal work. The Choral Society became what, the Concert Choir? What is it?

FL: Yeah, there's an MIT Concert Choir, and there's a chamber chorus now, too.

JC: Yeah. It was all important to the life at MIT, the emotional, therapeutic value of music like that at MIT, and Concert Band was one of them.

FL: So another thing I wanted to ask you about is MIT over the years has had many faculty members who are accomplished musicians, who aren't in the music department or Music Section, and if you can tell me about some of those people that you knew, and had you done any performing with them? People like Jay Keyser [Samuel Jay Keyser, MIT Professor Emeritus, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy; trombonist], and Doc Edgerton [Harold E. Edgerton, 1903-1990; MIT Professor, Department of Electrical Engineering, 1928-1990], and folks like that. Are there any people that you remember working with?

JC: We never worked with Jay Keyser, although what a nice thought that would have been! I think his forte is jazz—

FL: That's right.

JC: —with his group [a Dixieland style jazz ensemble, played for MIT Commencement celebrations]. And we always see each other at commencement time, where he has a group out there. And there was somebody in his group too, who is since deceased—that name? Doc Edgerton I didn't know as a musician, but his daughter, or

granddaughter, was a flute player in the band. And he housed some of the musicians who came to visit. You know, he was very cooperative and helpful in that. I'm trying to think who some of the other non-music department people there might have been. You mentioned Edgerton and Jay Keyser.

FL: There's a gentleman whose name I can't remember. He was a clarinetist. He was like a Dean of Humanities or something, and I'm just blanking out on his name. [Roy Lamson, MIT Professor of Literature, 1957-1973, and also held position of Special Assistant to the President for the Arts]

JC: Hm.

FL: He was a jazz clarinetist.

JC: [papers shuffling] I grabbed this at the last minute.

FL: Oh, my goodness! Wow! A time line of music at MIT! Wow! This is fantastic! [pause] Wow!

JC: Why don't you hold onto that?

FL: I can make a copy of this and give you back the original.

JC: Well, it's been in a dead file of mine.

FL: Okay.

JC: I went up attic to look for something else and found that instead.

FL: Wow!

JC: But does that give you a clue as to who that person might have been?

FL: Oh, let's see here. [papers shuffling] Not right offhand. I might be able to get that before you leave. I also wanted to ask you about Herb Pomeroy [1930-2007, director of MIT jazz bands, 1963-1985].

JC: Oh, yes!

FL: We're going to be doing some interviews with him as well. He's coming next Tuesday.

JC: Good!

FL: And tell me about your working with him and just what jazz—tell me about the jazz at MIT from your perspective.

JC: Thanks to Herb Pomeroy—and I was going to say, and people like him, but I'm not sure there are any people like him! [laughs] I never worked with Herb. I knew Herb, of course, and always felt that we were in very good hands with Herb Pomeroy. And he was certainly much loved, I think, among his players because there was some overlap of personnel. But I can't shed much light on that. I'm not sure whether this time line lists—gives any of the other people—if it mentions Herb Pomeroy.

FL: Mm-hm. Do you remember much about what jazz was like when he came and what effects he had on the jazz program?



JC: It seems as though that when I first came there was a jazz band called the Tectonians.

FL: Yeah.

JC: Is that right?

FL: That's right.

JC: And who led that?

FL: I'm not sure.

JC: Who preceded Herb Pomeroy?

FL: That's what I want to ask—I want to ask Herb about that. There were a lot of student-led groups that later were led by faculty and such. That might have been a group like that. Did you ever hear the Tectonians? I know they would play at various hotels downtown. They were a paid group; they actually got paid for their gigs and stuff. Did you ever hear them?

JC: This would have been pre-Kresge, before the days of Kresge Auditorium, when much of the activity took place in Walker Memorial.

FL: Right. They played for dances.

JC: Yeah?

FL: One of the things that happened when Herb came is they became a concert jazz band [MIT Concert Jazz Band, directed by Everett Longstreth], a festival jazz band. [MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble, directed by Herb Pomeroy]

JC: Yeah, yeah. [pause] Well, there used to be something that we played for called Techs-a-Poppin, or something like that. It was usually early in the year, kind of showed off the various groups on campus. The Glee Club would sing, the Tectonians seemed to play, the Logarhythms [a cappella group, founded in 1949]—

FL: Mm-hm, they're still around.

JC: —would sing. The Concert Band also played. But that was over in Morss Hall. Was that Morss Hall in Walker Memorial?

FL: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Hm. The Tech Show used to take place out at Rindge High School or one of the high schools in Harvard Square. And I thought they were going to have a hard time justifying Kresge Auditorium; I didn't think it would get much use, but wow!

FL: Tell me about when Kresge was finished [1955] and how that had an effect on music at MIT.

JC: Well, it got us out of Walker Memorial. I remember many rehearsals we'd be rehearsing to the sound of dishes being washed and all. We'd hear the kitchen packing up and dishes rattling and that sort of thing. I think it made it, formalized it a little bit. Because it was in 1956 that I was asked to do the orchestra, which I did for ten years. [The years he conducted the MIT Symphony Orchestra were 1955-1956.] And somehow there was a place in which to give concerts. And it seems as though

most of the rehearsals were there too, and only in later years did we have to rehearse over in the Student Center—in the dining room or in the Sala de Puerto Rico—and rehearsal space was always a problem.

And I always regretted at MIT that there never was really a rehearsal room with blackboard and chairs and stands that you could have a rehearsal in a rehearsal room: a place to store instruments and tuxedos and that sort of thing. And I know there are always rumors of a new building going up or the warehouse, the storage warehouse, being taken over as a part of MIT. [laughs] Always was that hope that might be an improved situation physically. But I think Kresge—no doubt about it—helped the music program a lot. Things sounded better there, of course, and the light was good.

FL: It enabled other outside artists to come—a more proper place for visiting artists.

JC: Yeah, yeah. And for chamber music, but also Boston Symphony played there at least twice.

FL: Wow!

JC: And I remember hearing Berlioz *Fantastique* Symphony [*Symphonie Fantastique*, op. 14] with [Charles] Munch, Boston Symphony, in Kresge! Wow! And you know, I sat up in the back row, up in the corner of the back row, which is the best spot to sit. And during a quiet spot—gee, I think he had *La Mer* [by Claude Debussy] on that same program. In *La Mer* I heard somebody's shoe squeaking, and I kept thinking it was coming from the first violin section or the second violin section. The acoustics were so good—wow!

FL: [laughs]

JC: The presence of the organ—well, first of all there was no organ. And I remember more than once trying some Gabrieli [either Giovanni Gabrieli, ca. 1554/57-1612, or Andrea Gabrieli, 1532-1585] with half of the brass in the choir loft, the other half over where the organ now is, for antiphonal effect. I'm not sure how well that worked. I know combining with the organ and the stage was difficult, getting it together. We had a piece written for us, commissioned by us, for organ and band, by Jeronimas Kačinskas [1907-2005].

FL: Oh!

JC: Lithuanian composer. And his friend Nomecka [spelling unverified] came down from Finland to be the organist and played at MIT. The reason I can remember his name, Nomecka, he no-make-a the notes in the five-eight time!

FL: [laughs]

JC: He had a problem with the five-eight. [laughs]

## 5. Reminiscences about the MIT Concert Band (1:02:40—CD2 01:20)

- FL: Wow! So over the course of these interviews that I've done with you, I've been asking you lots of questions. But I wanted to open up the process here and just give you a chance to talk about memories and stories, if you have some funny incidents you want to recall. You've been here for fifty years and it's quite an extraordinary time. So I just wanted to let you talk, and on any particular subject that might come to mind.
- JC: Well, I've always appreciated the aspects of the MIT position as including new music, new works, pieces that have never been played before, for which there were no recordings to refer to or anything. I've always felt the musical challenge for a conductor was quite stimulating. And in the middle of the summer I could be thinking ahead, "Well, next year we're going to do this. We've got a piece coming which we'll put in February, and here's a piece for next May." You know, there was always something to be looking forward to. There was always the big question mark: who's going to be there to play it? What will be—will we have enough horns? Will we have enough bassoons? The strengths of the sections, the depths of the sections, was always a concern. It was hard really to finalize a program until you had at least had one rehearsal and seen what the band could do. The enthusiasm and the intellect of the students, musicians, always turned me on.

And as I retired from the Brookline administrative position, in the schools, it gave me more time to think about MIT and what was coming up. I still had my professional group [Boston Brass Ensemble] to think about, so there was always plenty going on. And I used to tape rehearsals at MIT, so that in my automobile I could listen to what the last rehearsal was, where I stopped in such-and-such a piece, what I would do at the next rehearsal. So I didn't have to come over and get back to the podium and look down and say, "Oh, yeah, we need to do this." I had it all decided ahead of time.

And by making cassette tapes of rehearsals, it helped me shape the pieces too, the new pieces: the passage could go a little slower. This could build more right here. This is dull right here; let us do something about that. You know, it helped me shape the new pieces. I felt that I was creating something. Somebody obviously had written the notes, but I was still bringing it to life; I was still giving those notes life. And when a composer would write to me or speak to me afterwards: "You really make more out of my music than I thought I had put into it!" [laughs] That was a bit of a compliment always, that I had seen something in the score that he hadn't noticed, or at least he hadn't marked. [pause]

And working with composers was always interesting. Some composers were really so protective of their music that they got in the way. I couldn't shape the music because they were just breathing down every measure. And yet they wouldn't want to conduct, or if they did conduct they'd do it so poorly that I had to really tactfully take the baton away from them and conduct it myself in order to keep the group together. [laughs] It's not without its problems. Some composers really knew the concert band, knew how to write for the instruments. More than one composer didn't

know the instruments, particularly the saxophones, what the range of the saxophones is. And of course, I think the most misunderstood instrument is the euphonium or the baritone.

FL: That's what I used to play.

JC: [laughs] You know, and what's its function? Where does it belong in the total score? It was a learning experience for me as well, of course, to be taking a new piece and making it go. I still receive—even though I'm retired now from MIT, I'm still receiving pieces that they would like—that people would like to have performed! I received a piece from Paris, which I'll be giving to Fred [Frederick Harris].

FL: Wow!

JC: Yeah.

FL: Wow, that's fantastic. So are there any—?

JC: Oh, I got away from your question. [pause] A lot of the wonderful memories are as a result of the tours. There would be things on tour that would come up, sometimes in concert, sometimes between concerts when traveling from one city to another. In January or February we had, I think, three trips anyway to Canada, and those Canadian trips were always interesting. Some of the best audiences we played for were Canadian audiences. They really went for the contemporary music. Because I used to try to balance the program, to play the Mendelssohn Overture [Overture for Winds in C major, op.24], and maybe something late nineteenth century, before playing some of the contemporary music, but the contemporary music would turn the Canadian audiences on. They were more vigorous in their applause.

I always liked to use student soloists: student soloists with the band, student soloists with the orchestras. And I remember one concert, one tour, spending quite a bit of time on the phone with the host, in more than one case, more than one town, to make sure we had two pianos onstage for a double piano concerto, a piece for two pianos and band, and that the pianos be somewhat compatible, a match, not an upright and a grand, but two comparable pianos. And that worked out pretty well. We played some very challenging music on tour because we wanted people to hear the sort of thing they would hear if they were in Kresge Auditorium, not just a tour repertoire, not a pops-type repertoire. [pause]

FL: Were any particular humorous moments or funny stories that come out of some of those tours, in just being with the band? You've related some of those to me in the past.

JC: [laughs]

FL: Do they come to mind?

JC: I need to be reminded. I've had to try to think through some situations—is it worth telling? [laughs] We were playing the *Jericho Rhapsody*, by Morton Gould, which has to do with Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho, and the trumpets and the walls come tumbling down. I had an E-flat clarinet player named Moss, and he could play the shofar. So we took a shofar with us on tour. And he would go [sings] on the shofar. And I would have him demonstrate the shofar to the audience because

in the *Jericho Rhapsody*, the battle scene, there is the sound of the shofar. So that worked out all right. Well, during the concert there was a cloudburst and suddenly a lot of rain, and you could hear it on the roof of the auditorium, of the stage. And the same voice who had demonstrated the shofar said, “You want me to build an ark?”

FL: [laughs]

JC: As though he was speaking to God, you know! [laughs] That broke us all up. Chip Moss. [Chip Michael Moss, MIT class of 1977] Chip Moss [laughs]—that was precious.

FL: Wow!

JC: On the Double Piano Concerto I mentioned, with the two pianos, we had two student pianists. And there was a spot where on his piano over there, and his piano over here, it called for clusters to be played like this: [pounds rhythm]. Well, in rehearsals—we were running it through at a rehearsal and the band started to laugh during a rehearsal of the piece. And I wasn’t aware of anything. And they pointed and they laughed, and finally one of the band players pointed to the pianist, and instead of using their hands for the crash they were sitting on the keys. They were using their buttocks to do the crash!

FL: [laughs]

JC: They promised not to do that in the performance. I think they dubbed the piece “The Butt Concerto.” But they could be a lot of fun in rehearsals. More than once I would give a downbeat for a piece in rehearsal and they’d play “Happy Birthday,” and I would learn it was somebody’s birthday in the band. And you know, it would take, what, a minute and a half or so to do all of that, to acknowledge. And I would be anxious to do the rehearsal. [laughs] But they would still take time to do a “Happy Birthday” for so-and-so in the clarinet section.

FL: That’s beautiful.

JC: That’s some of the brotherhood or the togetherness of the band, which I think was very important.

FL: Wow!

JC: I have a big fat book of memories that the band members helped—I don’t have it in my possession right now. Charlie Mardge [MIT class of 1984] has it now. But for the 50th anniversary concert alumni were requested to send a one-page or a two-page letter describing what the band had meant to them. And I ought to bring that in—let you see that when I get it back. But Charlie’s organizing it because there’s some more that have come since May 1st—pages and pages of people who have written back to say what the band meant to them, including photographs of their children [laughs] and all that.

## 6. Future of the MIT Concert Band and Frederick Harris (1:17:50— CD2 16:45)

- FL: Beautiful, wow! Well, until Fred comes back [to the interview], maybe you can start talking about—he was a conducting student of yours.
- JC: For one semester. We were talking about it coming upstairs. It was the second semester of his senior year at Boston Conservatory. And it was a class of music educators. It was conducting for music educators—you know, how to conduct choruses, bands, and all, rather than how to conduct a Brahms symphony, or that sort. It was conducting techniques. And Fred was very good, spent very little time with him, as a matter of fact, because there were others that needed more help than he did. And then I think he went to New England Conservatory; I'm not sure. And then later, out west somewhere, he got a doctorate [University of Minnesota].
- FL: So it must be nice for you to know that a former student of yours has taken over the wind ensembles here at MIT.
- JC: Yeah, I hope he'll become aware of the traditions of music at MIT and let the students be the first consideration, that they're not here to be trained as musicians, but to have a musical experience that will support them in their other activities, both here on campus and—
- FL: Oh, here's Fred now. So Fred Harris has joined us again, and John was just talking about some of his wishes for what he'd like to see you do at MIT here.
- JC: [laughs]
- FRED HARRIS: Oh, good. We need to do a playback so I can hear that.
- JC: Well, we've really just gotten to that.
- FL: We just got to that. Just got to that!
- JC: Anyway, he asked me first about you as a student of mine at the Boston Conservatory, and I explained it was a class for conducting for music ed people [music education majors], and not a one-on-one situation where I taught you how to conduct a symphony or something like that. Although I think we did get into various beat patterns and all.
- FH: Mm-hm.
- JC: But that I spent very little time with you because there were others—you were very good and there were others who needed more help than you did. [laughs] So I was not worried about you getting along all right in a classroom. So that semester went by too fast. As for—what was the other point?
- FL: Well, you were talking about what you hoped that Fred would be doing at MIT here.
- JC: Yeah, I think it's going to be helpful for Fred to be aware of the traditions and the background of where people are coming from, and the appreciation that people don't come to MIT to learn to be musicians, although whatever experience they have in music should be first class. But the community, the social side of it, the therapeutic

aspects of music, is as important to them while they're students, to get them through MIT, and will be as adults when they go off into jobs, that they become interested in music and become important to the community orchestra in whatever town they're in. Or if they're elected to school committees, that they vote for music in the public schools, and that they be an asset to the community in matters musical, as well as professionally.

I have so many letters over the years of people who've gone off to other parts of the country and had such fond memories of what MIT meant to them, what the band had meant to them. Paul Husby [MIT class of 1976], for example, at St. Paul, built a community band, which he tried to model it after the MIT band.

FH: Hm.

JC: And to play some of the MIT pieces. He was a student conductor of the band, and in fact, he graduated and went off to St. Paul [Minn.]. And there was a tragedy. The newly-elected president to succeed Paul Husby, and his wife, were bell ringers. And they had gone off to a bell-ringing event out in Amherst. And I had an officers' party at my house in Bedford, and all the officers of the band were meeting at my house.

And the time came, evening, and we were having a cookout or something like that, out in the backyard. And still, no—I can't think of his name, I'm sorry, right now. But he was not there, and his wife was not there. And so I got on the phone and called his residence, and somebody else answered the phone and says, "Oh, haven't you heard? He was killed in an automobile accident, driving back from Amherst." Never did make it to my house. She was not killed; she lived. John, John—? Anyway, word spread quickly through the band, and Paul Husby, who had just been president, came back and did another year at MIT, in order to be president and help the band through that crisis right then.

FL: Oh.

JC: I'm not thinking too well or I'd remember his name. John something. I'll remember it probably sometime. We commissioned a piece for that occasion, and the piece is called *Lament for a Bell Ringer*, by Josef Cordeiro, I think it is. Cordeiro. [papers shuffling] Sir George Cordeiro, *Lament for a Bell Ringer*, 1978. Yeah, yeah. There again, it's a hard piece to program because it ends softly. But a lot of chimes, a lot of bells, a lot of mallets—a lot of bells in it. It's a hard piece to program, same as *Challenger: Ron McNair* [by Ira-Paul Schwarz, 1922-2006, composed in 1987], is hard to program. Hm. Sorry to get caught up on that, on top of all things, death, you know. Forrest asked me for anything funny that had happened. [Ronald McNair, MIT Ph.D. 1977; died in the *Challenger* explosion in 1986. See Corley interview 9/3/99, pp. 22-23 for further discussion of this piece.]

FL: You supplied some good stories there. During this interview we've been talking less about specific music things, but more kind of bigger issues. But here's an extraordinary moment. We have your successor here, during this interview, and it would be really great if Fred, you had some questions for him, and just seeing what the passing of the baton is like here. It's quite an extraordinary thing with the MIT Concert Band.

FH: Well, I remember from the class [conducting class at Boston Conservatory], when we first met, I'd always heard that there was music going on at MIT, and all this new music, but I never really, for some reason, never made it across the river, over here. And finally, when I met Mr. Corley, you know, there's this enthusiasm that he brought to the conducting class. I remember—you mentioned working with some of the students individually who needed extra help, and I remember him taking the time to really help some of the students who needed some basic, fundamental things.

And I can remember [laughs] bringing in—I think you had asked us to bring in any piece we wanted to, as kind of a final project, maybe to conduct or something like that. And I remember you were concerned because I think I brought in *Candide* [by Leonard Bernstein] or something. And I can't remember if there was a reason we all had to conduct each other's pieces we brought, but you were both glad that I brought in a piece that was a little bit more difficult to conduct, but also nervous that the whole class was going to have to conduct this, and that how would that all work out? But we had a lot of fun.

And I remember, I believe there was some kind of, something happened, and I think you came in somewhat last minute. You didn't know you were going to have to do this, yet you had all these materials, and he was all prepared. I particularly remember—and I still have it—a kind of a package you put together with some Toscanini words, and some notes, and even a photograph. It was just great! I remember, no one had ever given me an education on Toscanini before, and that was quite enlightening. But I remember that. I immediately knew that this was a special person and that this was somebody I could learn from.

And I never did get over here to hear any of the concerts! It was kind of—I don't know why, I guess. I ended up—I did come over here and played with one of the jazz ensembles as a sub at one point, but that was my only connection.

As you said before, some things could happen here that don't happen at the conservatory, and make it—that are difficult to happen. And you're right; I've experienced that here already. I mean, it would be rare for me to teach anyplace else where I could teach a jazz ensemble, a concert band, and a wind ensemble. I mean, there's a lot of variety that's offered here, that wouldn't necessarily—you kind of get typecast in other places. Whereas here there's opportunity for that not to happen. And you had the same experience, with conducting an orchestra for ten years, and also—and that wouldn't have happened, say, maybe at BU, or another place, or even Boston Conservatory. So that aspect of it has been great.

JC: You know, incidentally, my first name is John, Mr. Harris.

FL: [laughs]

JC: You know, looking at it from the students' point of view, we're lucky at MIT, in that to go to a rehearsal, get a chance to play your instrument that you've had over the years, that you took lessons on—or didn't, but you've learned to play. But if I'm a student at a conservatory, oh, another rehearsal where I've got to go sit and wait and count measures while the strings are learning their parts. We have an advantage at MIT that there's a thirst building up when there are no rehearsals on certain days. Now, "This is the day I have a rehearsal, looking forward to it." So we have that



- built-in enthusiasm on the part of the students that helps a lot. And you need to capitalize on that and channel that enthusiasm and the intellect. I'm sure you're quite turned on when you're working with these students.
- FL: So Fred, are there any questions that you have for John?
- FH: Well, I guess a couple of questions. Maybe one would be about all the commissioning. There's been so much of it, and how did you—I know I've done, compared to you, a small amount, and it's a lot of work to keep up with—well, who's writing for me now, and when am I getting the piece? And all of those issues, and are the parts ready? Are they legible? And I guess I'm wondering, with doing this consistently, literally one or two, if not more, every single year, how did you keep up with it all? Because it's a lot of work; it's almost a full-time job on top of just directing music you already have.
- JC: Yes, I was saying to Forrest, I'd be thinking about it in the middle of the summer, you know. And some pieces would arrive during the summer. And I would say, "Whoops. You're going to need a really strong band for this; you better do it first semester." Second semester tends to drop off because the guys get busy. And so I'd earmark this for December, this one for February, this one for May, you know. And depending on the condition of the materials, and I mean by that even the page turns—I'm very uptight about page turns. It's amazing how many people will write music right up to the last, and then you turn the page and they put it up here too. Like they have a third hand with which to turn the page!
- FH: [laughs]
- JC: And of course, with an amateur orchestra, I've been through page turn business, and if there's a page turn in the string section, you reduce the sound by fifty percent.
- FH: [laughs] They just don't play?
- JC: Half of each stand is turning the damn page. And with the Xerox machine it's been a lot of fun to fix up the page turns. And there's no reason the page turns can't be worked out. But composers—I'm grateful for composers sending parts. I've copied many, many parts over the years. I have boxes of manuscript that I've saved. Probably much of it ought to come to MIT because these are parts that were missing and I'd write it out. But many pieces came to us, Fred, that I didn't know about, that we didn't request, or didn't even know the composer, and would be appreciative if we did this.
- FH: So in other words, the word got out that you were doing a lot of the music, so you didn't even, some pieces, have to pay for it? They just would send it to you?
- JC: Exactly. Now, another way that we'd receive pieces, an example is—where's that list? Gosh, am I having a hard time with names today! Ruehr—what's her name?
- FH: Elena.
- JC: Elena. Elena, is it?
- FL: Mm-hm.
- JC: Elena Ruehr. R - U—? [Elena Ruehr, Lecturer in Music at MIT]

FL: E - H - R.

JC: All right, she sent me a piece [*Spin*, 1995]. I had done a piece of hers, and she had sent me a piece by a friend of hers who said she had never heard her piece played by a large group. And it looked very high school-ish, even middle school-ish. And I've still got to deal with that, write a letter or something, saying that it doesn't look like it's worth the time it would take to pass it out and run through the parts. I have some other pieces that I think are still at the house—maybe they're in the stack at Kresge. I can't think of his name right now, but it was so difficult! I mean, virtuoso bassoon parts, virtuoso horn parts! Wow, what did they think we are? It was really for a conservatory, somebody who's on their instrument everyday, studying, with a teacher who can help them with the parts.

FH: Mm-hm.

JC: Then I'd get some junk, too. One of which is an MIT composer. Well. Oh, I've got to be careful now. [papers shuffling] Marek Zebrowski.

FL: Marek Zebrowski? [MIT Affiliated Artist]

JC: Yeah.

FL: You didn't like his piece? Oh.

JC: Well, he's written more than one. He wrote *Perks!*—an overture for a musical [1995].

FL: Uh-huh.

JC: And we made something out of it, and we did it, and taped it. But it—[pause] it's pops-ish, Boston Pops-type. Not cheap, but hard to program. I used to put it on, I think, at the end of concerts, so people, as they were putting on their coat, had something light. Although they couldn't whistle it, or anything. Marek is still around, isn't he?

FL: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, *Perks!* was the name of the show, an overture to the musical.

FL: Because his other music is not like that at all. The String Octet of his that I performed is quite atonal, and it was a very difficult piece and it was a really fine piece. He told me about this band piece, and he was saying that it was quite different from what he normally does.

JC: Hm.

FL: That's interesting.

JC: Yeah, I think of it as being quite transparent, moving, show tune-type. It's over there, I think, in my stacks.

FH: Okay. Well, it's interesting. Other than—just to shift the subject just for a moment, other than the commissions, the other thing I'm fascinated with are all the pieces that have become, many of them have become, standard repertory pieces that the MIT Concert Band, with you, gave the first premiere, the first performances of in the Boston area.

JC: Yeah.

FH: And in fact, the other night at the concert, I had a little pre-concert talk and mentioned that in fact two of the major pieces on that concert, the Persichetti Symphony [Symphony no.6, op. 69] and the Hindemith Symphony [Symphony in B-Flat] , were premiered by you the very years that they were published, '56, and I think '51, respectively, and in this very auditorium, you know, as the time I was speaking about it. And that, I find, is fascinating. And I wonder if—you obviously had a sense that this was historically important, that you were giving these performances. But maybe at the time, you know, no one knew that these would end up being repertory pieces. Although with Hindemith writing a piece like that, and even Persichetti, they did, I guess, become almost instantaneously repertory pieces, in a repertoire that was just in its birth stages, I guess.

JC: There are a number of pieces that fit that category. Schoenberg *Variations* [Theme and Variations, op.43a] .

FH: Right, his *Variations*.

JC: I don't know whether the last time we talked, Forrest, I mentioned that Koussevitzky [Serge Koussevitzky, Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra 1924-1949] had turned me on?

FL: Yes, we talked—

JC: All the new music he was doing.

FL: Right.

JC: And I was very impressionable at the age that I first was aware of Koussevitzky, when I was in college and back after the war. And I liked so much the new music that Koussy was doing, and his devotion to playing pieces—even though the audience might not like it, he would do it. And sometimes he would do it again, the same season! He'd play a thing twice.

FH: So he was quite an influence.

JC: Yes, he was. And [Arthur] Fiedler was doing original music at BU [Boston University] with the orchestra. I remember manuscripts that I played with Fiedler. He was so difficult with the composers—gee! I can remember, I can visualize him now: when he discovered that somebody here had notes that were different than what he had in the score, he'd take the thing and throw it to the floor! Wow! Then he'd take the Beethoven Seventh [Symphony], and he'd take it so damn fast, that last movement: [sings]. I learned early on Fiedler going faster in performance than in rehearsals. If you're used to single-timing something, you better be able to triple-time it.

FH: [laughs]

JC: [several words indistinct] or the Beethoven Seventh.

FL: Wow, wow.

JC: I think it's because he wouldn't drink as much in front of the BU concerts as he did at Symphony Hall. But go ahead.

FH: No, no, no. It must have been a challenge to do some of those works, where no one else had performed them at all, really, let alone, you know, a non-music school ensemble. I don't think even those places were performing them. But to take a piece like the Hindemith Symphony. And certainly there were no recordings of it, you know. You just had the score. And the Schoenberg which is—very difficult pieces. It must have been quite a challenge to mount those at that time.

JC: It always depended on people too, as to who I had for people. Whether we had a baritone [horn] player who could play the Schoenberg. Forrest [Larson] played the baritone [in high school]—make a note of that. I don't know if he was guest soloist. Well, it was. And there again, I would tape a lot. I would tape rehearsals, so I could hear them at home, or hear them between rehearsals and see how I was shaping things. And it was the ever-present enthusiasm of the students, because they knew it was important, what they were doing.

FH: Mm-hm.

JC: It would turn them on too, that they would come up with ideas for pieces, yeah. Go ahead.

FH: Was it difficult to obtain some of that music? I mean, even knowing about it must have been tough, but you were obviously aware of everything that was going on. But I would think that getting a hold of some of that music back then might have been challenging too.

JC: Well, Carl Fischer [music publisher] used to be over in the store a couple of doors down from the Wang Center [theater in Boston]. And they had been very good to me over the years, and during the war they used to send me stuff, the Army, overseas mail, however it was—I've forgotten the labeling now. But they would send new publications to me, which I would get in Iceland. I was the band director in Iceland for twenty-nine months, did a lot of concerts up there, about seven hundred. [U.S. Army Band in World War II. See Corley interview 8/19/99, pp. 1-4 for further discussion.]

FH: Wow.

JC: Including serious concerts for the Icelanders, for the Canadian troops, the American troops, the British troops. I was very busy. But Carl Fischer would send me that stuff as it would come out, much of which I probably didn't get because of submarines in the North Atlantic. And after the war I would spend a lot of time there looking through new publications. And they would set aside stuff for me to look at because I was in the store.

FH: Nice.

JC: Patterson, Patterson—Warren Patterson for months was trying to sell me a piece by Percy Grainger [pause]. Percy Grainger, [shuffles papers] *The Fall of Rome*, or whatever it was, and the *Christian Heart*? What is the name of that piece? *The Power of Rome and the Christian Heart*. He scored all of that: organ, optional strings. And finally he reduced the price to \$25.00. I had it with me; I paid him right then and I bought that piece. And my gosh, so we did *The Power of Rome and the Christian*

*Heart* more than once, especially during those years where I had the orchestra as well so I could add the strings. And the organ was there. What a piece!

FH: [laughs]

FL: Wow.

JC: I forget where I am. You mustn't let me go on.

FL: So to tie things up, did you have a final question for him?

FH: Um.

FL: Here's a wonderful opportunity to have the changing of the guard, so to speak.

FH: Right.

JC: Ninety-nine! Did I give you this?

FL: Yeah, I made a copy of your list. You had made—those numbers there.

JC: Yeah, yeah. This is a more recent list. I thought I had sixty-five composers.

FL: So what we're referring to here is the MIT Concert Band repertoire list, and I had made a list of—there are sixty-five composers, thirteen MIT composers, and 145 compositions.

JC: I was looking for those figures and couldn't find them.

FH: Those are impressive figures.

FL: Yeah.

JC: And then I made a list, Fred; I'm not sure whether I gave it to you, but I'll run off another copy.

FH: Okay.

JC: I made a list of the manuscripts, the MIT manuscripts, and I rated them: most interesting, of medium interest, of little interest.

FH: Yeah. I don't think I have the complete list. You gave me a portion of it because I think that's all you had at the time.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Just because it was written for MIT doesn't mean it's good. [laughs] There's some junk there too.

FH: I guess in closing, it might be nice to just hear—and maybe you've already covered this—but what you feel, John, are kind of the most important aspects of the band, that have been of the band. The most meaningful aspects of it to you, I guess.

FL: Yeah, we went over some of that, but you might have some new thoughts as well.

JC: I hope I didn't say this, but I think the student involvement, the aspect of it—that I was sharing all this music with these people, and they were sharing their talents and interests and energies. And people would come up, “Do you know such-and-such a piece? We played it in our All-State,” or something like that. You know, the involvement, the student involvement.

The fact that it was, the band wasn't my band, but I was the musical advisor, so to speak, and the band belonged to the students, with student officers, and they ran things. And they would tell, "Can we have fifteen minutes for a meeting?" "When would you like it, during the break or at the end of the rehearsal?" or whatever. So I was there as the musical advisor and the professional on the scene, so to speak. Because people were taking it for credit and there needed to be a professional conducting. I couldn't let a whole rehearsal be conducted by student conductors because that would be short-changing those who were taking it for credit. And I sort of expressed that well.

FH: Yeah, it makes sense.

FL: So one final question I'd like to ask is Fred, what brought you to MIT? What interested you? I mean, obviously you had known John and had heard about the program here. But when you saw this job advertisement, why did you go for this one and not some other places?

FH: Well, the more practical reason was that I was about to be married to someone who was finishing her degree program in this area, so I really needed to have a job in this area!

FL: [laughs]

FH: That's the more practical response. But the other reality was that, as I said before, I love the idea of the possibilities that a place like MIT affords that other places may not. Also the fact that there's this immense faculty, there's talented students, and so much quality music going on in a place that's not a music school, where people aren't, as John mentioned, aren't here to become musicians. It's something that's a part of their life, and an important part, but it's not their main focus. Yet a lot of high-quality music-making goes on. And I think I felt it was a position that would allow a lot of growth for me and would allow me to be able to hopefully provide some help to students to grow through music, and hopefully that's what will happen.

FL: Wow! So I want to thank John so much for your—it's so generous of you to come and take part in these interviews. It's been an extraordinary experience for me. And Fred, it's been really great to have the two of you at this final interview. So I think we'll close here. And I want to thank you again very, very much.

[End of Interview]